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SUBJECT: FINNISH RESPONSE - APPROACHING THE EU IN ADVANCE  
OF THE JANUARY 28- 29 FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING (GAERC)

REF: SECSTATE 7679

(SBU) PolChief delivered the Department's GAERC talking points to Finnish MFA Deputy EU Correspondent Markku Lampinen on January 24. Two highlights:

WESTERN BALKANS: Lampinen noted that ministers are unlikely to approve sweeping conclusions on Kosovo prior to the Serbian elections. However, Kosovo remains among the most important of Finland's foreign policy priorities, and Lampinen said the GOF supports the Slovenian Presidency's suggestion that an extraordinary GAERC be held immediately after those elections to do a "thorough examination" of the EU's next steps. On the question of a Kosovar declaration of independence, the GOF fully shares our view that it is crucial that a significant number of EU countries join the EU in recognizing the Pristina government. Finland will "be among the first wave" to do so, he emphasized. Lampinen also reminded us that Finland intends to increase its KFOR presence from about 400 troops to more than 460 this spring and resume a "framework nation" role. The GOF also plans robust participation in the EU civilian/police missions.

MIDDLE EAST: Lampinen said the EU was leaning toward conclusions that would "gently urge" Israel to loosen the border and trade restrictions it has imposed on Gaza, particularly noting the need to allow delivery of fuel and humanitarian supplies. He also reassured us that the conclusions would contain language condemning the Hamas rocket attacks on Israeli civilians.

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